

Report: Mass. needs to push biofuels

By Steve LeBlanc, Associated Press Writer | March 7, 2008

BOSTON --Massachusetts should be doing more to encourage the use and development of biofuels, including funding research, offering tax breaks and promoting bio-refineries, a new report recommends.

The development of a biofuel industry in Massachusetts could create thousands of jobs and billions in annual revenues while reducing the state's dependence of foreign oil, the draft report by a special state biofuel task force said. The report, obtained by The Associated Press, is set to be released Friday.

Greater use of biofuels could also help the state cut down greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming, according to the task force, appointed by Gov. Deval Patrick, Senate President Therese Murray and House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi.

While cautioning that "the economic viability of advanced biofuels still needs to be proven and the true extent of the environmental impacts requires additional analysis," the report urges the state to take steps to foster a biofuels industry.

"Technological innovation is one of Massachusetts's prime strengths, and technology developed here can serve national and global markets," the report said.

Locally produced biofuels, the report said, could replace up to 6 percent of the state's use of petroleum and substantially more biofuels could come from other Northeast states.

Although corn-based ethanol is one form of a biofuel, the report says Massachusetts, with its limited farm land, should consider using other sources for biofuel, such as forest and agricultural waste, including leftovers from cranberry production, and even algae.

The report includes rough estimates of economic impacts of a biofuel industry.

Assuming that construction is spread evenly over a 15-year period, the report said, the overall annual economic potential from technology development, construction, and facility operation is estimated at 3,200 to 13,300 jobs, and \$760 million to \$3 billion in revenue.

Other recommendations in the report include:

- Exempting biofuels from the state gas tax;
- Building ethanol and biodiesel stations on major highways;
- Working with the federal government to support bio-refinery technologies;

- Adopting a Massachusetts version of California's Low Carbon Fuel Standard;
- Supporting the use of plug-in hybrid and all-electric vehicles;

Currently three biofuel refineries are in the planning stages in Massachusetts, including Twin Rivers Technologies in Quincy and Berkshire Biodiesel in Pittsfield.

The report also recommends Massachusetts become the first state to require all diesel and home heating fuel sold here to contain a minimum amount of bio-based alternatives in their blends.

Last year, Patrick, Murray and DiMasi unveiled legislation that would set standards of a 2 percent blend by 2010, increasing to 5 percent in 2013, in all diesel and home heating fuel.

At the time, Patrick said the initiative would help the state "create jobs, drive energy costs down, sharpen our competitive edge at home and promote environmental stewardship around the world."

Under the legislation, Massachusetts would also become the first state to provide incentives for the use of a more efficient ethanol technology, known as cellulosic ethanol.

The report will be the subject of two public hearings next week in Plymouth and Boston. ■